

VANCOUVER FIVE UPDATE

To sum up

On January 26th of this year, five Vancouver individuals were arrested in a para-military operation on the highway to Squamish, B.C. They were charged with a variety of offences. Some of these were specifically political acts: the dynamiting of a B.C. Hydro substation on Vancouver Island last May (the action was announced in a communique issued under the heading of Direct Action.), the fire-bombing of three stores in the Red Hot Video chain, which specializes in pornographic video, much of which features explicit acts of violence against women.

Other charges included: conspiracy to blow up a nuclear-powered icebreaker designed for northern resources extraction; conspiracy to attack the military base at Cold Lake, Alberta, where the cruise missile is to be tested; conspiracy to rob a Brinks' truck; possestion of restricted firearms; possession of stolen goods; auto theft, and armed robbery.

They have been held in Okalla prison in Burnaby, B.C. and have been refused bail. The judge, in a long statement, alluded to 'public safety' and 'upholding the laws of a free and democratic society' as grounds for this refusal. The refusal came in spite of support from family and friends and property and financial guarantees to the tune of 3 houses and \$30,000 in cash.

In contrast, Cecil Kirby, a biker, underworld enforcer, and a history of violence, was granted bail in exchange for turning police informer. He admitted setting an explosive charge which killed a man. While on bail and under police protection in Toronto, he was even able to severely beat on his woman friend while two O.P.P. cops stood guard outside his room.

What's News

The way in which the T.V. news handled the story immediately after the arrests discredited the journalism profession. Police speculation was reported as fact. There was much discussion about "anarchist networks stretching across the country". The word 'terrorist' was used repeatedly although nobody actually stated who was being terrorized. Rumours that arrests were imminent in Toronto were repeated regularly and, for that matter, are still making the papers. Yet when a communique was released under the name of the Wimmin's Fire Brigade stating that the Five were not and had not been members there was not one mention made in the straight media. The level of support and expressions of concern for a possible total miscarriage of justice made by groups such as the B.C. Federation of Labour and the Status of Women Council were also not considered news.

What Next?

It is quite likely that the B.C. Crown Attorney will skip a preliminary trial and proceed by direct indictment, which is a legal but quite unusual procedure which means that the Crown does not have to reveal their evidence against the defendants before the trial itself actually begins. The last time this was done in B.C. was against Clifford Olson, who had already admitted to his crimes anyway. That the B.C. government would choose to proceed in this manner clearly shows the extent to which they want to manipulate the judicial process. The trial itself is slated to begin September 12th. The preliminary was to have begun May 2nd.

The Litton Charges

Not much more can be added to what was in the papers. Certainly, they won't

be brought out here for quite a while. There are careers to be made on this case and the B.C. police and Crown Attorneys get first crack. All in all, it doesn't seem like the evidence is very strong against them at all. Conspiracy charges generally indicate a weak case.

Evidence

An official publication ban exists against the release of the evidence held by the Crown. Some of the evidence was revealed at the bail hearing, from 138 hours of tapes from room bugs and wire taps. The tapes frequently feature outrageous comments followed by peals of laughter. One can easily predict that much of the legal battle will focus on the actual meaning of the content of the audio tapes as opposed to the meaning that can be construed as damning evidence. The legal admissibility of the tapes will certainly be questioned under the guarantees of the new Constitution.

Who Supports Them and Why

In Vancouver, the support has been immediate and broad-based. The women's community has been particularly demonstrative in its support. But individuals and groups within the youth, peace, ecological, and anti-authoritarian communities have worked together to show that the State will not be able to count on apathy to railroad the Five in peace and quiet.

Significantly, support has come from the two areas of struggle where the bombings took place. The B.C. Federation of Women, which refused to denounce the firebombings of the porn stores, said that; "We will not be intimidated or divided by police or media harassment. The arrests of the five individuals cannot be used to dismiss the protests of thousands of people." "We join with other groups and organizations to condemn the unjust treatment of the five accused at the hands of the courts and media."

The Cheekeye-Dunsmuir Alliance, which has been fighting the power corridor, of which the substation formed an essential part, has stated; "Based upon our experience with the criminal injustice system, our concern is that the individuals charged be dealt with fairly... We have seen RCMP harassment and surveillance of numerous environmentalists, feminists, peace and anti-nuclear activists. We have seen media coverage that can only be described as sensationalist, prejudiced, and inaccurate". "Such smear tactics are being used to discredit and intimidate all of us. We will not be intimidated. We will continue to work for the health of our environment, our economy, and our children."

Why we in Toronto should offer our support

There are three possible reasons for support. The first is simply that these five people deserve as fair a trial as is possible under the circumstances. With a large number of people monitoring the trial, the possibility that the State will overcompensate for lack of evidence is decreased. The second position is one which recognizes that all activists, no matter what their politics, or their activity, are vulnerable to State action. Hence, active support for the Five is a drawing of lines, a recognition of who the real terrorists are. The third position includes the above but is more in accord with their politics regardless of their guilt or innocence. The Toronto coalition has people from all three positions.

What are the politics of the Five

The word 'anarchist' has been bandied around rather loosely in the media but political labels are not that helpful in understanding what the five supported in their pre-detention days. They base their politics largely on the Native concept of "Protect the Earth", including all of its peoples. Everything flows from this passionately held idea. They support efforts to create human culture which exists in a harmonious relationship with the natural world. The list of areas in which they have been involved include: ecological, native rights, women, pornography, third world support, anti-nuke, prisoner support work, local media, music and others.